REL 2011 Introduction to Religion
Fall 2020 Syllabus
REL-2011-U08 (85150)

Florida International University

Instructor: Eric Isaac

When and Where do we meet?
REL 2011-U05
PC 439
MWF: 10-10:50 AM

Contact: Please use Canvas Messages. Alternatively use: Eisaac@fiu.edu

Office Hours:
Due to Coronavirus ONLY by appointment. I’ll work around your availability.
Feel free to ask me any questions after class observing physical distancing & mask wearing if you are taking an in person course. I am very accessible, please feel free to reach out any time.

A note about COVID & Modality:
Due to the nature of COVID in person courses may be forced to move to a remote teaching modality. If this were to happen, we would continue meeting via Zoom during the same course hours.

Why Should I Care about Religion?
Why do I struggle to lead a meaningful life? How do I determine what makes life worth it in the face of suffering and evil? Is religion irrelevant in our fast-paced technological world? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? Is religion a creative or destructive force? These are just some of the questions that we will explore throughout the semester.

This course is interested in examining the different expressions, practices and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular religion will be favored, materials from several religions will be chosen to exemplify thematic topics in the experience of the Sacred. We will also focus on the tenets of religions, dispelling common misconceptions and assumptions and looking into the emergence of new practices among the post-denominational generation.
How can this course help you advance in your career?

You do not need to be personally religious, majoring in religious studies, or in a field within humanities to benefit from this course. Whatever your academic field is, this course will train you to make important connections between your career and the world of the sacred and the profane. You will be able to understand the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization, and the role religion plays in local and international affairs.

Religious illiteracy can greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies. Religion greatly influences one’s epistemology, or the way they deal with what is true or false, as well as the way they look at the world. If we fail to understand religion & secularization, we may fail to understand people.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study such as philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, among others. This enhances your ability to think critically, communicate effectively, respond sensitively, collaborate with others and creatively resolve conflict.

I. How will you succeed in this course?

1. Buy the required text

Feel free to buy older editions to save, but you are still responsible for the material in the below edition.


2. Take good notes in class so you can do well on the exams, and discussion portions!

Examinations (20%)
Discussion (20%)
40% of total course weight
3. Do not procrastinate on the writing assignments or the site visit!

Proof of Visit (5%)
First Draft of Site Visit Essay (10%)
Final Draft of Site Visit (15%)
First Draft Personal Analysis Essay (10%)
Final Draft Personal Analysis Essay (20%)
60% of total course weight

II. Course Objectives, Goals, & Plagiarism Statement

Objectives
1. Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to ethnographic, psychological, sociological, ethical, phenomenological, and so on.
2. Compare and contrast the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern, Western, indigenous and shamanic religions.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.
4. Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film, and so on.
5. Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
6. Correctly distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources, and scholarly vs journalistic sources.

Goals
● Foster tolerance of and appreciation for differences in human culture and diverse religious expressions.
● Develop fluency in ancient and contemporary religious history.
● Expand ability to apply different methodologies to the study of religion.
● Create an atmosphere of self-exploration and self-understanding.
● Nurture creative and critical thinking.
● Identify the relevance of studying religion to contemporary life, human thought, and professional development

Global Learning Objectives
As a Global Learning course, students will be meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:
1. Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
2. Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions
3. Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.

Statement on Plagiarism
You are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity if you need further clarification. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely or partially stolen from another source;
2. Using quotations from another source without properly cited them; and
3. Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class. You may not “reuse” papers.

Late Assignment Policy
I do accept late assignments, however, if you turn in late work the highest grade you can get for that assignment is an 85. This even includes first drafts that are ‘replaced’ by final draft grades. No, you cannot turn in all of your assignments at the end of this course.

III. Course breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Landmarks</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Scale In points</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forum</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof of Site Visit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visit Essay (First Draft)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visit Essay (Final Draft)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Analysis Essay (First Draft)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Analysis Essay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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**IV. Assessment Descriptions**

**A. Essays**

**Gordon Rule Requirement**

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write a minimum of two major assignments. The essays must have a thesis, and adequately support that thesis. The essays must be organized clearly and logically. Each paper will be at least 1500-2000 words and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using Chicago style formatting. Please be aware that papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points). Please do NOT send any writing assignments as email or message attachments! All writing assignments must be submitted in the proper drop box in Canvas; there are no exceptions. Late papers may be accepted with a legitimate excuse and a 10% penalty for late submission. After more than two weeks, papers either be refused, or will be discounted by up to 50 percent at the professor’s discretion.

1. **Essay 1: Religious Site Visit**

   For this essay, you will need to visit a religious site from a religious tradition that is not your own and write a report on it. This paper must have a thesis. Detailed assignment instructions and format are provided in the course. You will be revising this essay. Due to COVID, you will not be required to physically visit a religious site. So feel free to attend a virtual religious service. People plagiarize all the time on this assignment, if you do, you will fail the course.

   - **First Draft:** You must submit at least 1000 of the minimum 1500 words, include your thesis, conclusion, and a bulleted plan for any parts missing from your essay to receive full credit on the first draft.
   - **Final Draft:** After my feedback on first draft the final draft must be at least 1500 words long, and cover 3 elements of the religion or site you are
2. Essay 2: Personal Analysis

For this essay, you will analyze yourself using the theoretical frameworks for analysis presented in this class. The purpose of this assignment is to assess whether you understand the basic concepts of the study of religion. Using Geertz’s definition of religion on page 8 of *Anatomy of the Sacred*, identify what 3 symbols act most powerfully in your life to the ends he describes, and then articulate how they form a meaningful theodicy in your life. This will serve as your thesis for this assignment. Support the ‘thesis’ by describing & defending your chosen symbols meaning against the backdrop of suffering & evil. Detailed assignment instructions and format are provided in the course.

- **First Draft**: You must submit at least 1000 of the minimum 1500 words, include your thesis, conclusion, and a bulleted plan for any parts missing from your essay to receive full credit on the first draft.
- **Final Draft**: After my feedback on first draft the final draft must be at least 1500 words long, and cover 3 symbols that act most powerfully in your life against the backdrop of suffering and evil.

**B. Site Visit**

In order to complete the first essay, you must select a religious site and provide proof that you were there. A picture with you at the site is sufficient, if you happen to attend a physical service. A link to the online service/gathering you attended is also sufficient.

- Visiting the site by the deadline and submitting the proof by the deadline alone is worth 5% of your total grade. Your grade for this this assignment will drop by 20% for every day you are late, so please plan ahead.

**C. Discussions**
There will be a total of 8 discussions. The discussions will take two forms. The first form will be portions of your essays so that they can be revised & edited by myself. The second form will be posting in response to a question posited in the Lectures. These will be responded to by your classmates.

- The discussions will short and are here to aid you with your papers.
  - 4 of the discussions are submitting elements of your essays so they can be edited. This helps you write more efficiently & effectively while still meeting Gordon Rule requirements, saving you time and helping your grade.
  - The other 4 discussions are responses to lectures and current events. They must be at least 300 words. You will be required to respond to 2 other classmates posts with responses of at least 75 words.

- All discussions must be thesis based, so they must have one clear idea throughout the post.

**D. Exams**

The Midterm Exam and Final Exam will be available online during their respective scheduled dates. Each exam is worth 10% of the final grade, for a total of 20% of the final grade. Format: multiple-choice and true/false questions based on assigned readings. No late submissions will be accepted.

**E. Participation/Attendance**

Your attendance will be monitored. If you are not in class (physically or virtually depending on circumstance), your grade will be affected. You will also be lacking critical information to complete the assignments. Miss over 20% of classes and you will automatically fail the course. I am very understanding of missing classes, and will not count them against you so long as you communicate with me ahead of time via email or canvas messenger.

**F. Extra Credit Opportunities**

Extra credit can account for up to 4 percent of your final grade. All extra credit assignments are due no later than Friday, December 4th at 11:59 pm, ET. Absolutely no extra credit or make-up work will be accepted after the date.
1. Extra-Credit film review

Review a movie and write a three-paragraph film review (300 words) describing the role that religion plays in the story or event. Focus on religious symbols, rituals, myths or the ways in which religious beliefs or practices influence the plot or meaning of the movie. Do not tell the whole story of the movie, but just enough so that your points are clear. **The movie selection must be approved by the instructor.** This extra credit paper is worth up to 2% of the final grade.

2. Extra Credit site visit

Visit a religious site from a tradition that is not your own, and that you did not visit for the first essay. Following the same guidelines as the first essay provide evidence of your visit. Then write a three-paragraph site review (300 words) detailing your experience interacting with the site. The extra credit paper is worth up to 2% of the final grade.

V. Grading Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Range (%)</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Range (%)</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Range (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95 or above</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 - 86</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 - 76</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 - 94</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 - 82</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>60 - 69</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 - 89</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 - 79</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 or less</td>
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VI. Course Calendar
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| **Week 1**  
January 11-17 | **Topic: What is Religion?**  
- READING: Chapter 1, pp. 1-14  
- Introductions, syllabus review, class plan  
- Lecture “What is Religion”  
*Remember to start your Religious Site Visit research early!* |
| **Week 2**  
January 18-24 | **Ways of Studying Religion**  
- READING: Chapter 2, pp. 15-34  
- Lecture: Social Science & Religion  
- Lecture: Interpreting Religion + Site Visit Paper Explained  
*Have you done your Site Visit???? Proof is due next week!!!* |
| **Week 3**  
January 25th-31 | **The Sacred and the Holy**  
- READING: Chapter 3, pp. 35-52  
- **DUE:** Proof of site visit Jan 31st  
- **DUE:** Discussion 1-Religion & the Sacred Jan 31st  
- Lecture: Sacred Power  
- Lecture: “The Sacred and the Holy” |
| **Week 4**  
February 1-7th | **Sacred Symbol, Myth and Doctrine**  
- READING: Chapter 4, pp. 53-73  
- **DUE:** Discussion 2-Intro/Thesis Feb 7th  
- Lecture “Myth I.”  
- Lecture “Myth II.” |
| **Week 5**  
Feb. 8-14th | **Sacred Ritual**  
- READING: Read Chapter 5, pp. 74-95  
- **DUE:** Discussion 3-Conclusion Feb 14th  
- Lecture "Ritual I" |
| **Week 6**  
Feb. 15-21st | **Sacred Scripture**  
- Read Chapter 6, pp.96-123  
- **DUE:** First Draft Site Visit Paper Feb 21st  
- Lecture "Scripture I" |
# Society and the Sacred

**Week 7**  
Feb. 22-28

- Read Chapter 7 p. 124-150  
- **DUE:** Discussion 4-Scripture, Society, & the Divine Feb 28th
- Lecture "Society and the Sacred"

## Concepts of Deity/ Ultimate Reality & Cosmogony

**Week 8**  
March 1-7th

- Read Chapter 8, pp. 151-182  
- **DUE:** Final Draft Site Visit March 7th
- Lecture “Deity”  
- Lecture “Cosmogony I”

## Cosmogony

**Week 9**  
March 8th-14th

- Read Chapter 9, pp. 183-210
- Lecture “Cosmogony II”  
- Personal Assessment Paper discussion & Mid-term review
- **Mid Term Open:** March 8th-March 28th  
  Mid Term to cover only to chapter 8.

## The Human Problem & The problem of Evil

**Week 10**  
March 15th-21st

- Read Chapter 10 pp. 211-234  
- **DUE:** Discussion 5-Humanity & Suffering March 21st
- Lecture “The Human Problem”  
- Lecture "Theodicy"
- **Mid Term Open:** March 8th-March 28th

## Assignment & Writing Week

**Week 11**  
March 22nd-28th

- Read Chapter 11 pp. 235-258  
- **DUE:** Discussion 6- Intro/Thesis March 28th
- **DUE:** Discussion 7- Conclusion March 28th
- **DUE:** Midterm Exam March 28th at 11:59 pm, ET  
  ***No Late Submissions Accepted you had 3 weeks***
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>March 29th-April 4th</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td>Read Chapter 12 pp. 259-286</td>
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<td>Due: Discussion 8-Ethics &amp; Death April 4th</td>
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<td>DUE: First Draft Personal Assessment Essay April 4th</td>
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<td>Lecture &quot;Ethics&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>April 5th-April 11</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Salvation and Liberation</strong></td>
<td>Read Chapter 13 pp. 287-337</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecture &quot;Soteriology: Salvation &amp; Liberation&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 14</th>
<th>April 12-18</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Age and New Religious Movements + Secularization and Pluralism</strong></td>
<td>Read Chapter 14 pp. 341-360</td>
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<td>Read Chapter 15</td>
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<td>Due: Any Extra Credit April 16th</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Due: Final Draft Personal Analysis Paper April 16th</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lecture &quot;Secularization/New Religious Movements&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 15</th>
<th>April 19-24</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Final Exam Week</strong></td>
<td>Final Exam open April 16th: 12:01 pm – April 24th 11:59 pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Take Final Exam ONLINE by April 24th-any later and I cannot give you any grade other than 0</td>
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